



# WMF News

**WMF** is a section of the Simon Stevin Centrum  
Edition 3 of 2009

Composed by Frank PHILIPPART

Dear Reader,

In this third edition of WMF-News you will read about big air-raid bunker in Ostend, a museum in Dunkirk and about fortification artefacts at the Duxfort museum and several others. You will also get some feedback about the Atlantic wall at the Belgian coast. Finally there's a book review.

Enjoy.

## Problems with our WMF website

The website of WMF, <http://www.geocities.com/wmfanr1/WMF-home.htm>, doesn't exist anymore. Geocities stopped with the service. Meanwhile I'm looking for a new location to restart.

## SPOTLIGHT ON A MUSEUM

### "Memorial Du Souvenir" at Dunkirk

Dunkirk. Well known for Operation Dynamo, the fabulous escape of the British and French troops in June 1940.



Lesser known is the museum dedicated to this operation. It's situated in one of the remaining bastions of the defense of the harbor and city. It's very close to the beach of Dunkirk. Outside, a French AA gun attracts your attention. Inside, you see maps showing the advance of the Germans towards Dunkirk, the day-by-day situation on documents and many photographs of soldiers waiting, wading, bombed ships, abandoned vehicles, chaos.... There's also the classic collection of artifacts like

weapons, headgear, equipment of the British, French and Germans and some aircraft engines. There are also two large scale models showing the situation on the beaches and on the quays with ships and Stuka's. The movie, which is mandatory nowadays in museums, is pretty good. War time pictures showing attacks on ships. The biggest piece of the collection is a nice Czech 10.5 cm Skoda Mod 14/19 gun.

As far as fortifications are concerned, there's a French Renault tank turret with a 37 mm gun, a French FT17 tank turret for MG and the main item for bunker lovers is surely a complete 47 mm PAK 36 (t) gun with its huge armored plate.



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If you know that Dunkirk was a German pocket of resistance until 9 May 1945 and if you know that it was heavily fortified and you want to see something about this period then you will be disappointed. It's only about Dynamo.

On the slope behind the museum is a half buried MG bunker and at the corner of the street there's a monument to the memory of French World War I ace Georges Guynemer. On the dike there is a monument commemorating Operation Dynamo.

The museum is located at the Rue des Chantiers de France, F 59140 Dunkerque.

Info at the Tourist Office : 33 (0)3 28.26.27.81. Email : [production@ot-dunkerque.fr](mailto:production@ot-dunkerque.fr).

Web site : [www.dynamo-dunkerque.com](http://www.dynamo-dunkerque.com).

The museum is open every day from 1st April to 30th sep from 1000 – 1200 Hr and from 1400 to 1700 hr.

Groups can always visit the museum but then you have to make an appointment.

## ATLANTIKWALL

### Luftschutzbunker at Ostend

Last summer I visited a huge air raid shelter in the barracks of the Belgian Navy : Kazerne Bootsman Johnson in Ostend at the 3<sup>e</sup> & 23<sup>ste</sup> Linierregimentsplein.

The air raid shelter was built by the Germans during World War II and such a construction is called in German : Luftschutzbunker.



Why was it built?

Due to increasing allied bombardments on large cities, industries, railway junctions and ports the German were forced to build bunkers specifically to protect civilians and troops. These constructions were called *Luftschutzbunkers*.

They could vary in size from one-room-bunkers to giant constructions several dozen meters long and wide and several storeys high. Various heavy and light anti-aircraft guns could be placed on the roof too. But with these we are talking about the colossal shelters in big cities like Berlin, Hamburg and Vienna.

Ostend had also a few of this type of bunker, indeed no giants but well worth considering. One stood at the Marie Joséplein and has disappeared in the mean time, but the other one, which is bigger, still exists and stands on the grounds of the barrack Bootsman Johnson.

After the war the bunker was used by the Belgian Navy during the Cold War as a telephone-exchange.

How does it look inside?

Two things of this bunker attract your attention.

The first item is the saddle-shape roof that is typical for this kind of bunker. By this shape it's almost impossible to receive a direct hit with a





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surface bombardment. (I believe it could be possible with a dive bomber). Secondly are the huge dimensions of the bunker : 68 m long and 8.5 m wide. The walls are certainly 1.5 m thick.

The bunker has two entrances on each side. Each entrance is closed by an armoured door which is not a German construction. After the door you come in a small hall from where you can go to the different rooms. Here's also a small storage. The bunker consists of two storeys a ground and a first floor. The staircase to the first floor starts in the hall. On the other side of the



**The ground floor.**

bunker you go get to that level via a ladder with spokes.

Each floor is divided in one big room (the half) and several smaller rooms. It looks like some walls are post-war because these walls are thinner than initially built.



Actually you see still the equipment of the telephone-exchange. Further on it is used to dump unwanted furniture. There's still electricity and a ventilation system although I have some doubts if it still can function. On the western side there's a toilet block externally built to the bunker. Finally I noticed that the bunker is extremely dry.

Looking at the large and smaller rooms, the presence of electricity, its dryness and the thickness of the walls, I think it would be a splendid place for music groups.

## Follow-up : Eastern bank at Ostend



I refer to WMF-News 2009-1 in which I was talking about excavations of the last unknown bunkers on January the 4<sup>th</sup>. Meanwhile architect "Monument In Ontwikkeling (MINO)" has been appointed to design a plan to open the Halve Maan. It's certainly not easy because there are several layers of different time eras. During the summer all the bunkers and constructions have been excavated to offer MINO the possibility to inspect them seriously. These excavations delivered some interesting surprises like the discovery of the use of railway beams in the roof of a small bunker and an extremely well preserved World

War I building of the German battery Eylau! This plan should be ready at the end of the year and



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the Works might start in 2010 when the subsidies are available. Otherwise it will be 2011. They expect that the works will take 1 to 1 and a half years. Together with the Halve Maan they will work on the glacis of Fort Napoleon. As for the Hundius battery, the renovation works will start after the Halve Maan project has been completed.

For more info : [www.oostendeoosteroever.be](http://www.oostendeoosteroever.be) and Mr Bart Slabbinck, Buitengoed, [bart.slabbinck@buitengoed.be](mailto:bart.slabbinck@buitengoed.be)

The excavated World War I bunker.

## The battery of Adinkerke is getting a museum

During many years Mr Robert Moeyaert collected militaria of World War 2. The collection now counts about 2500 items including uniforms, helmets, an airborne motorcycle, an old bicycle, radio-transmitters amongst others. The communality of De Panne bought the collection and wants to display it in the summer at the battery site of Adinkerke, Domein Cabour. To have a spotlight for the museum Adinkerke received a huge Leopard 1/A5 tank of the 2/4 Lanciers of Leopoldsburg. The tank stands now at the cross-road of the Moeresteenweg and the Woestijnstraat at Adinkerke. The men who took the initiative for the museum and the tank are Mr Norbert Desiere and one of our members Mr Guido Mahieu. The photo comes from Mr Mahieu.



## GREAT BRITAIN

### Fortification artefacts at Duxford airfield

In October the members of the Belgian Tank Museum made a roundtrip in England and they visited the former RAF Base Duxford, now a part of the Imperial War Museum. Not only airplanes but also fortifications and armored vehicles can be seen.

#### Alan Williams Turret

This pillbox formed by a half cylindrical metal turret, which could rotate 360°. It was installed above a steel and brick-lined pit. It was designed for all types of light machine guns or for a Boys Anti-Tank rifle. Firing could be done through the front opening or through the circular opening in the roof as an anti aircraft position.

They were mostly installed at airfields because the army did not like the design.

Nearly 200 Allan Williams Turrets were made and installed, but the scrap drive after the war means that very little remain nowadays.





## Pickett-Hamilton pillbox

This pillbox was designed to defend the airfield runways. It was an elevating pillbox. The combat compartment was sunk into a concrete pit. During an attack the pillbox was raised by the hydraulic system (origin was a garage lift). The first models had only a manually operated system.



It was occupied by 3 soldiers with a light machine gun.

The forts often became waterlogged and were not very successful. Later on, they were found too light armored to resist the weight of the heavy bombers on the runways.

This model was never installed at Duxford, the displayed model comes from the RAF airfield West Malling in Kent.

## 9.2 inch (23.37 cm) Coastal Defence Gun



It's an example of the standard coastal guns installed in the British Empire in the early 1900's. Originally it was installed at the Spur Battery in Gibraltar, dismantled and displayed at Duxford in 1982.

This type of coastal gun was installed on strategic places all over the Empire to be a counterpart for the new heavily armed warships of early 1900's.

The gun was installed in Gibraltar in 1902 and stood 345 m above the sea level and 76 m below the top of the Gibraltar Rock. Its only war action happened on December 31st 1915 when German submarines were located off the coast.

The gun was upgraded from a Mk 5 to a Mk 7 in 1935 : the armor was increased and the control systems were updated.

It fired its last 29 rounds in 1973 at a towed target and booked several direct hits.

Later on Exocet guided missile systems replaced the gun.

Calibre : 23.37 cm      Length of barrel 11.24

Maximum range over 25.6 km

Weight (gun & breech) : 25.450 kg

Rate of fire : 3 to 3 rounds per minute

Rotation 360 °      Elevation -5° to +35°



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[http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~rwbarnes/defence/silloth\\_/phfort-.htm](http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~rwbarnes/defence/silloth_/phfort-.htm)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British\\_hardened\\_field\\_defences\\_of\\_World\\_War\\_II](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_hardened_field_defences_of_World_War_II)

Source : Hendrik Trappeniers

## COLD WAR

### Belgian command bunker now a museum

This is about the huge bunker at the foot of the Kemmelberg at Kemmel in Flanders . It was built in 1954 and was the centre of the air-defence of West-Europe, but from 1963 on it became the headquarters of the Belgian army in cases of crisis and exercises. The bunker is entirely under ground and measures 30 m by 30 m. There is a large command room and several others for other purposes such as for the medical officer. Amazingly all the telecommunication equipment and the maps are still there. In some rooms there are cupboards with uniforms and arms of the western and eastern forces of that period.

The bunker is open on Wednesday and Sunday from 1000 to 1700 Hr.

Source : Miguel Verhas

## BOOKS

### \* LA LIGNE MAGINOT - TOME 4

The long expected part 4 is finally there. It is about the Maginot Line in the Alpes. With their well known way of writing the authors give information about the specific structures and techniques of the works of the Maginot Line in the Alpes which differs quit a lot from the ones in the north. The book abounds with pictures, drawings and photographs. The second part of the book is concerned with the infantry and artillery units manning the works in the Alpes. There will also be a part 5 and that's expected for the end of 2009. I guess that we will find in here an overview of the forts and their history.



The authors are : Jean-Yves Mary, Alain Hohnadel en Jacques Sicard. ISBN : 978-2-915239-46-1.

Language : french. 182 pages. 350 photograph's and 250 schema's.

Price : 39.95 € , but if you order on the site it gives you a 5 % discount and free postage within Europe, thus 37.95 €.

<http://livres.histoireetcollections.com/publication/2345/la-ligne-maginot-tome-4.html>

### \* KW-LINE BICYCLE ROUTE

There is a new map about a new cycle path with appropriate explanations about the KW line in the area of Haacht, Hertent, Kampenhout. Length 30km. The route starts at the station of Wespelaar. The brochure contains information about the KW-Line, a decent map and a good description about the environment with photo's.

Price 1.7 € (with postage : 2.3 € (for Belgium!)) Order the map by transferring the amount to account 001-3135203-45 of the "Regionaal Landschap Dijleland vzw" with the remark : "Bunkers Binnenste Buiten". Website : [www.kwlinie.be](http://www.kwlinie.be)



Source Hendrik Trappeniers

Thanks to Yvonne Mayo for the spell check.

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